

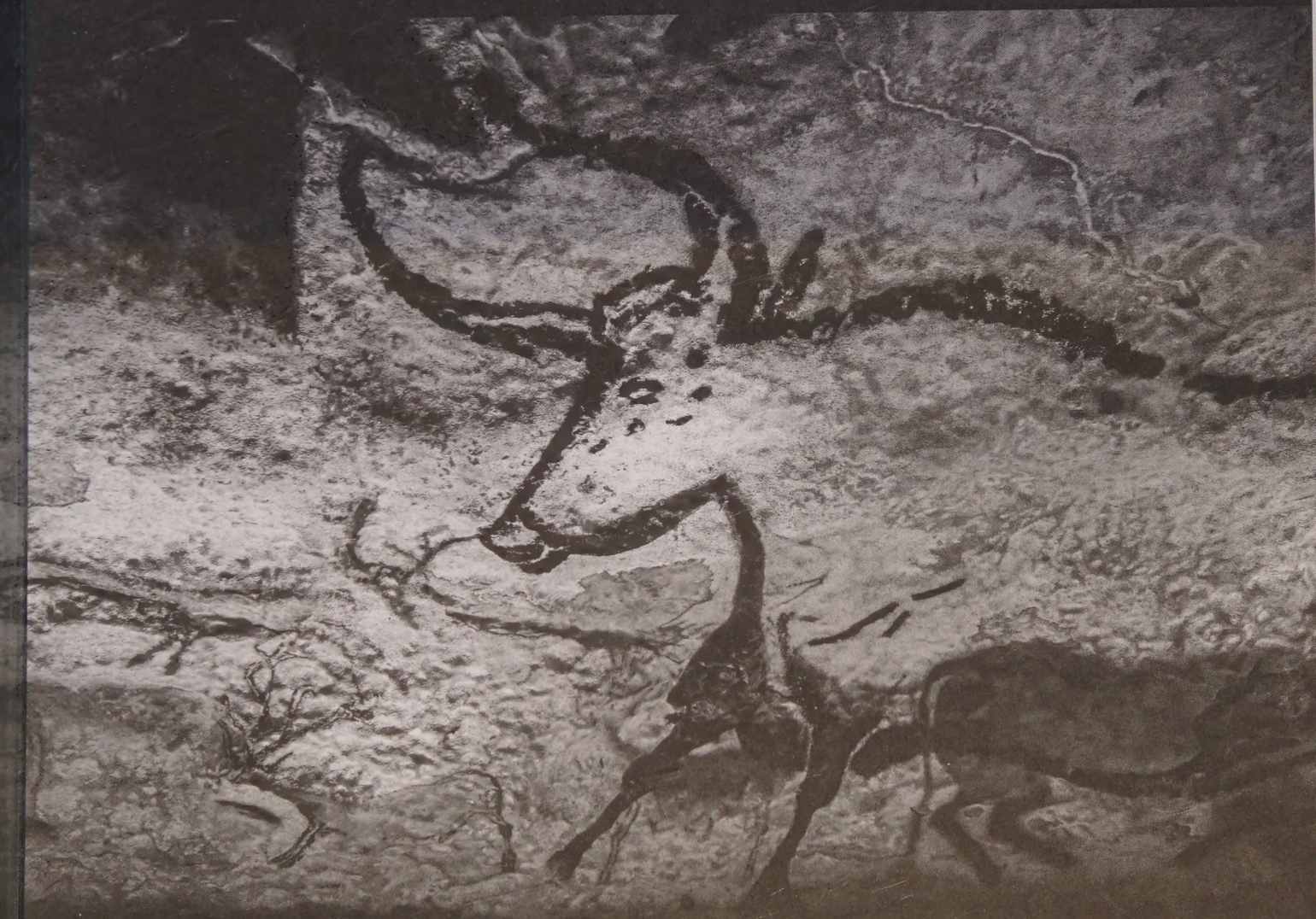
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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7925 21 October 2017

Journey of faith

Stone Age to the Nuclear Age



Cave paintings at Lausaux

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THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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Inquiring Words

I remember Autumn. I remember the turning of the leaves, they turn each individual shade of green, as the mornings start to look a little darker, and clouds change and stay a little longer. I remember the cool crisp winds as they brew up a little more. And the falling temperatures of the beautiful summer that have kept my heart and mind warm.

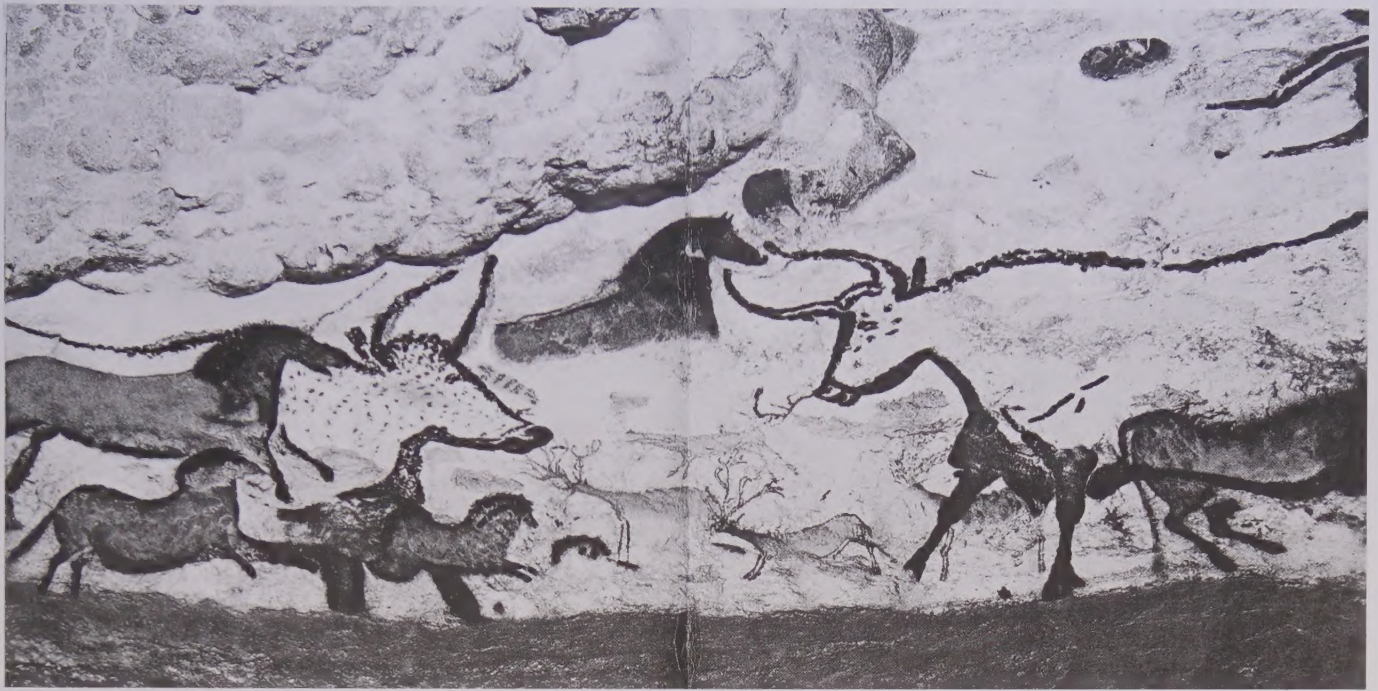
I look at the turning of the leaves as they take their time to turn to that warm orange, and start to fall, one by one; I look at the branches of the trees as they become a little more bare. I remember feeling the impression of time as it passes; I wonder if time has its own sense, does it know when to turn the leaves. I remember the mornings that follow one from the past to the next and then to afternoons which hold the sun, that little lower in the sky.

I feel the rain as it washes through the branches, and more turned leaves fall, and the drizzle that sits in the air, I remember the smell in the air that is there to let you know Autumn is here, there's no turning back now the turning of the leaves has started its journey. We are one with what it shall bring.

I remember the coldness becoming more as the sun sits yet lower in the sky. And there it is; it belongs to us with nature, the turning of the leaves. I remember seeing my breath in front of me as the light fades a little more each day. Autumn is here and not only do I remember last Autumn, I know this Autumn now, as I see the sun through all the bare branches of the trees. It's winter soon. But I keep Autumn with me, for as long as it shall be my guest.

— Karl Stewart

Is Lascaux about shamanic visions?



Wellcome Trust image via Wikimedia Commons

Art created by Palaeolithic humans set **Iain Brown** on a quest. Are those paintings evidence of a spiritual life?

A few years ago I visited France and my daughter, Ailie, took me to the caves of Lascaux, Rouffignac and Padirac. These were awesome experiences. As so many have done, we marvelled at the ways in which the pictures had captured so vividly on flat walls the three dimensions and the sense of movement of the animals – probably more than 17,000 years ago. And we questioned each other about the strange crosses, signs and dots on the walls alongside the paintings and compared them to the strange spirals cut by our Celtic ancestors in the rocks around Kilmartin in Argyle, which had so intrigued us before. I was talked into buying a book titled *The Mind in the Cave* by David Lewis-Williams, and it led me into the world of paleo-psychology, the minds of early man and woman – and, of course into their religion. And that took me on a journey to the present day and to a deepening understanding of my own religion and perhaps, even, of myself.

We have traces today of the first river valley civilisations on the Nile, the Euphrates, the Indus and the Yangtze Kiang (about four or five thousand years BCE – about seven thousand years ago) and the pre-Columbian civilisations of South and Central America are roughly contemporaneous with these. But 17,000 years ago, the time of the cave paintings is more than *twice* as far away as those remote civilisations of our ancient past.

But it was the cryptic signs from 10,000 years ago that intrigued us. Several framed squares (rather like a naughts and crosses set but with a frame round it); some parallel lines; some part curves, like boomerangs, sitting inside each other; lots of clusters of dots seemingly arranged randomly; the occasional part of a curve with what might look like a tiara of

jewels round it; and so on. It was only when I read *The Mind in the Cave* that I realised someone *had* made sense of it. And fascinating sense it turned out to be. The explanation advanced came from recent experimental psychology laboratory reports of human experience in altered states of consciousness.

What is an 'altered state'?

Now, let us look at what we mean by 'altered states of consciousness'. Altered in what way, we have to ask? By hypnosis, perhaps, by extreme (often near-death) experiences, perhaps, by various drugs, by crowd hysteria, or by schizophrenic or epileptic invasions of consciousness. Most people in the west prefer to restrict the term 'altered states of consciousness' to extreme hallucinations and trance states and we see these alterations as inferior states to what we might call the 'full light of reason'. But we can all experience more gentle alterations of consciousness such as that produced by some music, by beautiful scenery or we can even experience a sense of awe as part of what we call worship.

In training of astronauts since the 1960s it has been found that prolonged total sensory deprivation (for example floating in the dark, in total silence, in a tank of glycerine) produces all sorts of hallucinations in altered states of consciousness – with some people being more susceptible than others. It is also well known that altered states can be produced by a repeated mantra or chant, by prolonged drumming, by continually flashing lights and by sustained rhythmic dancing. So there is a spectrum of varieties of altered states of consciousness.

A group of cognitive psychologists led by Martindale and Siegel systematically investigated visual experiences in altered states of consciousness. Martindale maintains there are two different trajectories along which alteration of consciousness can proceed. A normal path of alteration of consciousness, can pass from the concentrated reasoning clarity of the consciousness that we westerners so value (and upon which all our scientific and technical achievements have been built)

(Continued on page 6)

Celebrating what we have in common

A vibrant multi-faith service attracted 200 people to Padiham Unitarian Chapel in Lancashire on 24 September, for an extraordinary celebration of music and songs from around the world.

The large congregation joined in as an inter-faith women's choir, *Sacred Sounds*, led singing from many traditions, including Jewish (partly in Hebrew), Christian (Gospel), Hindu and Muslim, and from Celtic spirituality.

The Shahe Mardan group, who introduced a form of Sufi Muslim devotional singing known as Qawwali, followed them. This combines traditional South Asian musical instruments, including drums, with haunting devotional songs of great power.

The service began with prayers and readings from the Bible and the Qur'an. And in a short address, Jim Corrigan said while those taking part enjoyed different traditions, it was vital that those of faith also came together to celebrate what they had in common, especially the core teaching of all religions, that 'love and peace should rule our hearts and our societies'. 'In this spirit, we raise our songs of joy and hope to God,' he said.

Rauf Bashir said the essence of Sufism is about striving for



Sufi Qawwali musicians from the group Shahe Mardan begin their devotional singing at Padiham. Photo by John Hewerdine.

nearness to God – and music represents a pathway for this. He spoke of the different types of Sufi music and songs – all of which express 'the longing to be closer to God'.

Rauf Bashir concluded: 'God showers unlimited love and mercy on us all, if we choose to receive it.'

The Rev Jim Corrigan is minister with Lancashire Collaborative Ministry.

This was multi-faith – Padiham style

By Ed Fordham

We arrived early – not knowing the normal congregation. And we were pleased to see a scatter of folks in the Chapel. But as the service start time approached, still they kept coming and the entire place was abuzz with the air of anticipation. As the punters packed into the pews, this felt like the opening night of a show, a concert – but in fact this was a multi-faith service Padiham-style.

Hosted by the Rev Jim Corrigan and presented jointly by Rauf Bashir of the Free Spiritual Centre in Pendle, this was a colourful, warm, evocative service of music, song, sound and prayer. Held on Sunday 24 September, this was a feast for any who felt hungry for good news and positive stories in the modern world. This was a welcome collision of east and west, a positive smorgasbord of styles, tastes and forms.

First up were Sacred Sounds – an inter faith women's choir of about 20 who effortlessly shared with us choral harmonies drawn from Celtic, Jewish, Gospel, Hindu and Muslim traditions. And we were treated to the rhythmic drumming and devotional singing from the Muslim Sufi tradition known as Qawwali from the six-strong Shahe Mardan group. It's always hard to capture the sung word on the page but this was an intense, deep, strong form of contemplation and worship that drew in even the most reluctant worshipper.

For our part we were glad we had come so far – the distance and the early start had fallen away from us as we were swept up into the warmth, the welcome and the worship in Padiham. The friendship was palpable.

I found myself reflecting on the troubles of the world, of the suspicions of difference, fuelled by ignorance, and thinking how this sort of service, this shared experience set me at ease. And looking round the chapel at the younger people, the mix of generations, I thought this too can surely only help in this modern war of news coverage and virtual reality. For the reality created here in the Unitarian Chapel in Padiham – this was positive, emotional, strong and real.

Even as we broke for comfort, before resuming for more (and the clamour was for more) you could feel the smiles, hear the joy and see traditions shared from neighbouring towns just minutes away here in Lancashire. And whilst Padiham, Nelson and Burnley are close by, this was faith drawn from across continents and across centuries. People have sought to understand the issues of miracle, joy and wonder before us and have turned to wisdom, thought and music as a means of expression and engagement. Today it worked and made sense.

This would all be credit indeed, due to both Jim Corrigan and Rauf Bashir, but the service and the concert were followed by a literal feast for over 200 of us in the Chapel's Unity Centre well named and all rather apt and very welcome indeed.

Rauf Bashir in his words to those gathered had said 'Just as the rain and the sun do not differentiate between people, neither should we. Only when you experience friendship across cultures, do you understand that there are good people in all communities.' And here in Padiham Unitarian Chapel this Sunday morning he was right.

Ed Fordham is a Unitarian ministry student.

Czech Unitarians find hope in UK Visit inspires Pride participation

By Matej Fixl

Czech Unitarians spent more than a week on the road. Nine of us flew over to London, rented a van there, went through the Midlands to Wales and then all the way back again. We visited Unitarian congregations in Ditchling, Norwich, Kendal, Nottage and two congregations in London. That is the shortest way to describe our trip, but it surely does not say much. The actual journey we took could not be measured either in miles or in kilometres. All I can do is to highlight a few moments and themes that seemed especially important to our group of travellers, and to thank with all my heart the members of every congregation that offered us their hospitality and friendship.

Our first visit was at the Essex Unitarian Church in Kensington. We spent a lot of our time in the Lindsey Hall, named after Theophilus Lindsey. The themes of Unitarian dissidence and oppression of dissidents by the Anglican Church were with us during the whole journey. And it helped us to appreciate the current religious and spiritual freedom and its possibilities even more. In our country, the term 'dissident' usually refers to contemporary history, to activities and people who were persecuted during the communist regime at various times between 1948 and 1989. Our understanding of dissidence is different because of this. But maybe it also allows us to approach dissidence on an intuitive and personal level more easily.

During the visit of the Octagon Chapel congregation, we appreciated the large number of varied activities its members participate in. Their activities include care for people, suffering from memory loss due to an injury, illness or brain stroke (the program is called Forget-Me-Nots), social services for homeless people, or visits to people in prison. Gavin Howell offered an inspirational speech and presentation of approaches that can be used in order to stimulate and support activity in Unitarian congregations. We realise that supporting activity 'from below' is very important in our congregations in the Czech Republic and making the congregations more active, self-sufficient and visible to the general public is still a big challenge.

Another theme we noticed in the congregations we visited was the visible support of marriage equality. Czech Unitarians were not visible on Prague Pride in the past. But this summer we decided to change that. On 12 August, Ruth J Weiniger and I represented the Religious Society of Czech Unitarians in a booth alongside many other organisations that participated in the Pride. We talked with parade participants and offered them our books and journals. I think it was an important step for us



Czech Unitarians with friends from Nottage at the Pen-rhiw Chapel at St Fagans. Photo provided by Kristyna Ledererova Kolajova

since we need to learn that visibility is a necessary part of any social commitment.

During this trip I also strongly realised that we lack the community basis, which is quite strong in Great Britain. The roots of this deficiency lie, at least partially, in the gap in community life that was caused by the communist regime, which severely persecuted religious activities. The dominant Catholic Church has dealt with this issue more successfully due to its reference to tradition as well as its strong support from abroad. But the Protestant community and other liberal religious communities in the Czech Republic, including our own, still struggle with this unfortunate heritage of recent history.

An issue we share in both our countries is the lack of young members in our congregations. In the case of Unitarians in the Czech Republic, we also often face the assumption that the openness and inclusiveness of Unitarianism is its weakness and that young Unitarians are eventually bound to join another religious society or church which will offer them stronger leadership, rules and reference to tradition. Good knowledge of the international Unitarian heritage should help us to face up to these assumptions, and that is also why I was so happy for this opportunity to travel and learn from the Unitarians in Great Britain.

In short, there are many challenges ahead. It would not be wise to withhold this fact, to bury our heads in the sand and hope that our problems will somehow solve themselves. Still, it was quite reassuring to meet so many people across the whole country who share the values of reason, freedom and tolerance. Every meeting was a great source of hope to all of us and a reminder that every person and community can spark change and influence the world in a positive and loving way.

Matej Fixl is a member of the Religious Society of Czech Unitarians.

Our visions in common with ancestors

(Continued from page 3)

into a daydreaming state and then into a pre-sleep or hypnagogic state, where people see images just as we pass over into sleep, and finally into deep dreaming sleep.

Symbols in hallucinations or migraines

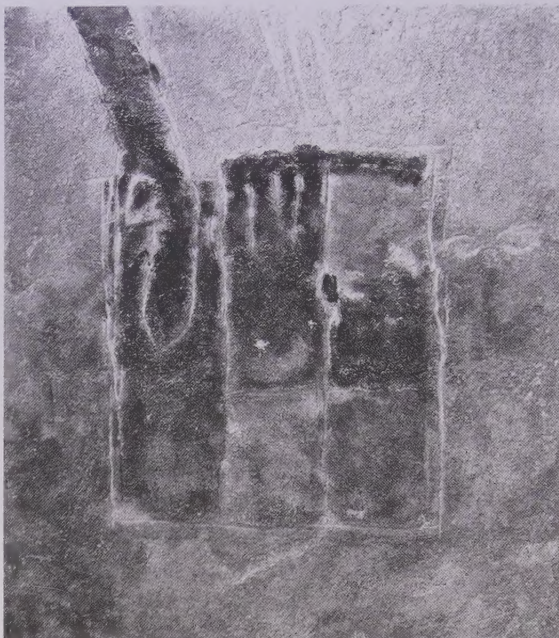
But with the second, intensified trajectory, which may be boosted by ingestion of substances (but not necessarily so) as we pass beyond daydreaming we encounter what Martindale and Siegel call 'entopic phenomena'. These are visual, and they are encountered before we progress to full hallucinations. They can be reproduced in the psychological laboratory and they are usually seen as square frames, bunches of dots, parallel lines, etc. – like what Ailie and I saw alongside the wall paintings on the Stone Age caves. Migraine sufferers occasionally see

these figures and signs. And, research has shown that the symbols are internal phenomena generated by the brain and the eye together – with no connection to external reality. Besides being reproduced repeatedly in the laboratory, these entopic phenomena are found worldwide – with slight cultural variations (sometimes even alongside cave paintings) in places as diverse as South Africa and North America.

The experience of moving from normal consciousness to the hallucinatory state comes in three stages. First there are the entopic phenomena common to all mankind. Then, as the person goes deeper into the altered state, there come the more hallucinatory experiences and they are variously reported on, as different groups of voyagers in altered states have tried to make sense of their trips and agreed on their experiences.

The move into the third, deep, stage of the voyage is often experienced as a swirling vortex, or a rotating tunnel that seems to surround them and draw them into its depths. Often, too, a bright light in the centre of the visual field creates and intensifies the illusion of a tunnel. This phenomenon seems to correspond to what is commonly reported by patients who have recovered from a near-death experience. Beyond the vortex the experience is described in a variety of other cultures, sometimes as flying, sometimes as going below ground down a hole or down the roots of a tree. More than 90% of all known cultures on earth have 'culturally patterned forms of altered states of consciousness.' It then leads to a description of existence in three tiers, below ground; on this earth; and above the earth.

There seems little doubt that the cave painters of 17,000 years ago were familiar with what we know today as shamanism in which community leaders (shamans) in indigenous religions around the world go into a trance or sacred state and bring back prophecies, miracle cures, and sacred wisdom – not just in shamanistic cultures but also in parts of some very an-



This image, taken from a replica of the Lascaux Caves, shows the patterned boxes which are also experienced by epileptics and those in altered states. via Wikimedia Commons

cient and prestigious religious cultures.

There is a convergence of evidence from different sources:

1) Anyone can see the cryptic projections of the wall of the caves for themselves.

2) Anthropologists have found similar signs in ancient places around the world.

3) Psychologists are able to reproduce these forms in the laboratory.

4) Contemporary reports of near-death experiences from patients who are deemed to have died for a few seconds are remarkably similar.

In the Upper Palaeolithic age all were hunter-gatherers and most probably used a range of customarily altered states of consciousness.

As people with special powers and skills, the shamans, were (and still are) in indigenous cultures, believed to have access to alternative realities, typically below ground and in the sky. Certain altered states create the illusion of dissociation from one's body (commonly understood in hunting and gathering shamanistic societies as possession by spirits). In present-day indigenous communities, shamans still use dissociation and other experiences of altered states of consciousness to contact spirits and supernatural entities, to heal the sick, to control the movements and lives of animals, and to be able to change the weather.

Altered states are in all faiths

Many paleo-anthropologists have emphasised the importance of altered states of consciousness in the genesis and practice of all religion. Even the towering arches, the stained-glass gloom, the incense and the singing of the choir in a modern Roman Catholic Church can be seen as intending to induce an altered state of consciousness. Peter Furst, author of several books on the ritual use of hallucinogenic drugs, wrote, 'It is at least possible, though certainly not provable, that the practice of shamanism ... may have involved from the first – that is, the very beginnings of religion itself – the psychedelic potential of the natural environment.'

Without stressing the use of psychotropic plants to alter consciousness anthropologists such as James McClenon who writes in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1997) '[Shamanism, the result of cultural adaptation to biologically based altered states of consciousness], is the origin of all later religious forms.' And Weston La Barre came to the same conclusion: 'All the dissociative "altered states of consciousness" – hallucination, trance, possession, vision, sensory deprivation, and especially the Rapid Eye Movement dream state – apart from their cultural contexts and symbolic content, are essentially the same psychic states found everywhere among mankind; ... shamanism or direct contact with the supernatural in these states ... is the *de facto* source of all revelation, and ultimately of all religions.'

There is plenty of evidence that our more recent religious ancestors in the Middle East some 3000 years ago had already inherited the cosmology

Does worship alter our consciousness?

of a three-tiered universe with a place below and a place above and they built their temples (ziggurats) on high points where their priests performed rituals (consciousness altering rituals perhaps?) uniting heaven, the underworld and the here and now.

Turning from capricious gods to explanations

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition you will have little trouble in finding visions and revelations, dreams and strange fantasies – all in the interpretation of internal mental phenomena such as the Stone Age shamans practiced 45,000 years earlier at the beginning of almost entirely unrecorded human time. Just think of Isaiah and, of course the favourites of the American religious right, the books of Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation.

We today can look back at the development of scientific thought as a sea change in our mental development. Before that, mythical explanations based on the capricious intervention of the Gods were advanced ad hoc independently of each other for each natural phenomenon. Probably Thales of Miletus (the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, mathematician and astronomer living on the Ionian coast in the 6th century BCE) is the first example of this new way of thinking that we know of. He was able to predict the eclipse of 585 BCE because he deduced the existence of universal laws. Before that, people believed the Gods controlled events, making them unpredictable. General laws, universally applicable, would increasingly be induced from a study of a widespread field of incidences. These general laws would then be used to deduce or predict what could be expected to happen. And if not, the laws needed to be modified to take account of a wider range of causal factors. As is universally recognised, the ancient Greeks gave us our open enquiring science of today.

But this new way of thinking took a very long time to spread and penetrate. It was not even self-consciously and systematically described until Francis Bacon and the philosophers of science in the early enlightenment. And even after that, it was often overwhelmed by forces of revelation and dogma reinforced by secular power such as in Nazi Germany.

St Paul's epileptic vision

Moving into New Testament times, we see in the Damascus experience of St Paul, the man who was the *real* founder of Christianity, as an example of revealed truth, possibly arising from an epileptic storm. We see the Emperor Constantine, allegedly guided by a vision, deciding to make Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. And we see many others throughout the dark and middle ages claiming personal revealed knowledge as authority.

We Unitarians are still a battleground where scientific knowledge of the nuclear age meets revealed knowledge, where magical thinking about the Christ and even about the historical Jesus meets literary, historical and scientific criticism. Our ancestors on the radical far left of the Protestant revolution, long ago escaped the magical thinking that surrounded the alleged transformation of substances in the ritual of the Eucharist. In the 19th century we threw out miracles and the alleged magical status of the scriptures as the infallible voice of our Judaeo-Christian God well before other branches of the Christian religion. And many, but not all of us, have not stopped travelling in this direction.

Yet there are nostalgic yearnings among us too. There are those who want more magic. One of our Glasgow ministers



Swimming stags in the caves at Lascaux. Some anthropologists believe the string of dots on the fourth stag's antlers are a tally of full moons. Photo by Bernie Taylor via Wikimedia Commons

who would beat his shamanic drum on Saturdays used to complain that we were totally lacking in any sense of ritual. Some, not only ministers, want to experience a Christian Communion ceremony. An article in *The Inquirer* asked if we might consider becoming more 'happy-clappy' like the Pentecostals. Though judging by the published post in return, the answer was a fairly resounding *no*.

We Unitarians are pretty far out on the cool, rationalist end of the spectrum of churches. We are the children, not so much of revelation as of the enlightenment. Yet we are not desiccated calculating machines. Many of us regularly experience mildly altered states of consciousness, an awareness of awe, reverence or mystery such as the theologian Otto named 'the numinous'. It is often experienced in the dusk among the mountains and lochs, on the tops of some hills, around a waterfall, in the forest. I have even experienced it in the midst of the most hectic traffic around the Marble Arch in London. Sometimes, some of us experience a more universal sense of oneness with the universe and all forms of life within it. Most of you will have had some such equivalent experiences.

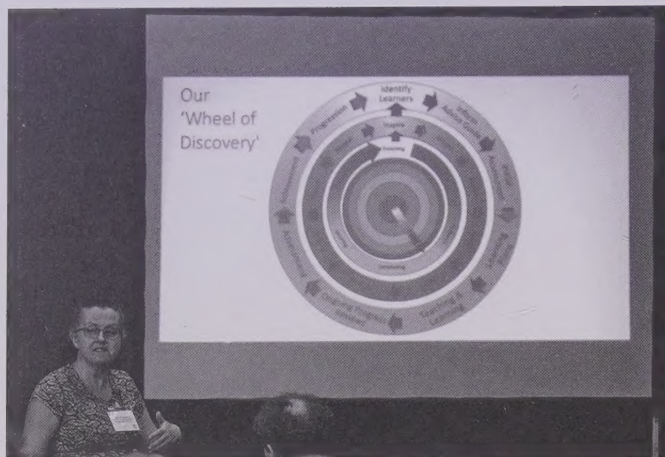
When I come to contemplate the wonders of this life I can usually revive a state of awe at will. If I did not have that sense of mystery and awe which could be called worship, I would consider myself unfit to lead others in what we conventionally call worship.

Yet, I have to ask you, is what I experience, and I guess many of you experience, as a mild altered state of consciousness much different in kind from the long traditions of ritual and ecstasy stretching back to our forefathers in the caves? Of course we may not take hallucinogenic drugs like the ancient Hindus who took the soma juice from the magic mushroom, the Fly Agaric; or like the students and professors of theology of Harvard and Princeton who took LSD in the 1960s, as Tim Leary wrote up in his banned book, *The Politics of Ecstasy*; or like the army chaplains in Jaroslav Hasek's bitter satire on militarism who felt closer to their God after they swilled copious amounts of the blessed communion wine. We do not find these aids necessary.

Do we experience, as we worship together, mildly altered states of consciousness?

Iain Brown is a Unitarians service leader in Scotland and a retired Senior Lecturer on Psychology in the University of Glasgow.

Executive Committee considers Next Steps



Rachel Skelton presented the TED project at the GA meetings.
Photo by James Barry

Executive Committee Key Messages, 14 July 2017

1. Training and Education Development (TED) Project

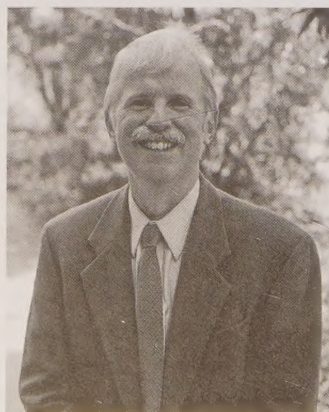
The Executive approved a proposal to take forward the training and education project from October 2017 building upon the significant progress over the last year. The following recommendations were accepted:

- I. Work with stakeholders, including the Ministry Strategy Group, in developing the Ministerial training pilot programme to begin in September 2018.
- II. Continue the work of the TED Project from 1 October 2017 for the financial year 2017-18 to further develop the Framework for Lifelong Learning encompassing ministerial learning and development.
- III. Set up a Foundation CIO, independent of the General Assembly, and do the preparatory work required for the Foundation ultimately taking responsibility for all Unitarian Learning and Development.
- IV. Allocate Next Steps funding for the costs of this development work.

A CIO is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, a new form of charity status. A detailed proposal for the governance of this development work will be presented to the next meeting of the Executive Committee in September 2017.

2. Identity

A paper was received from Robert Ince as a follow-up to the discussion at the May EC meeting. It was acknowledged that the identity guidelines would be helpful in initiating conversations within the wider Unitarian and Free Christian community and that there would undoubtedly be a creative tension which reflected our diversity. This was positive and EC links would be seeking to involve Districts in discussions on how we



Robert Ince

saw ourselves and then how this is reflected in the way we present ourselves to the outside world.

It was agreed that professional expertise would be required if the work was to be embedded within the community and a draft job description and person specification for a temporary staff position has been requested for the September Executive Committee meeting.

3. 2020 Congregational Growth Project – Derby Unity

A progress report was received from the Leadership Team of the 2020 Congregational Growth Project on Derby Unity, an initiative supported by the East Midlands District. Over the first 16 months attendance has risen to between 16-22 and a core group of 8 has formed. The learning to date has been shared at the Annual Meetings. It was recognised that to rollout the 2020 Congregational Growth Project to other locations, which was an integral part of the original aspiration and now a "Next Steps" priority, required additional capacity and finance and this would be considered at a future EC meeting.

4. Grants

The Executive Committee awarded the following grants:

- I. £1000 to support the forthcoming Unitarian Theology Conference at Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds by funding the 'Faith and Freedom' journal to publish the papers that are presented. This would be a contribution to the "Next Step" priority of encouraging more Unitarian thought and writing.

- II. £990 to the Findhorn Unitarian Network to provide three bursaries for people in leadership roles in Unitarian societies and districts to attend the Findhorn Unitarian Experience Week in January 2018. It was also agreed that the deposit of £2856 would be paid by the General Assembly to assist with cash flow and to be repaid in December 2017. This would support the "Next Steps" priorities of encouraging collaboration with other bodies and providing enhanced training opportunities.

5. EC Links

The EC links to Districts were agreed:

- Marion Baker – East Cheshire and Sheffield
- Philip Colfox – Western and Southern
- Sheena McKinnon – Manchester and Yorkshire
- Lynne Readett – North East Lancashire and Merseyside
- Christina Smith – East Midlands and London and South East

- Matthew Smith – Midlands and Eastern
- Rob Whiteman – Northern and Scotland

It was acknowledged that the resignation of Gwynn Pritchard left a gap on the EC and as a link to the two Welsh Districts. As an interim measure, until the vacancy was filled, the Chief Officer will work with the Welsh Department Secretary to ensure two-way communication is maintained

Don't 'fake it to make it' – keep it real

The greatest danger to living the authentic life – to living with sincerity and integrity – is what I think I know; what I think I know about myself, others, life and the spirit that is at the core of all being, that I call God.

With this in mind each morning as I awake, as I begin my morning devotion and open myself in humility, I say a few words of prayer asking that I can lay aside whatever I think I know. I lay myself open to the mystery at the core of life. And I ask that whatever I believe I know about the four realms of existence does not become a barrier to new experiences. The four realms (as I understand them today) are of the mind, the body, the heart and the spirit. As a result I am finding new truth being revealed to me constantly. I am finding myself less inhibited by my self-created fears and the fears created by others that they attempt to pass on to me. How many times in life are we held back by our own fears, and then take on board the fears of others?

'Keep it real'. It's a phrase you hear quite a lot these days. It's about being authentic, living with integrity. Some people go to extremes to prove their 'realness'. But if you need to prove it, then in some sense you are not being real at all. If you feel the need to seek the approval of others, you are not living with integrity.

Many years ago the tragic Richey Edwards, second guitarist and lyricist from the Manic Street Preachers, infamously carved the phrase '4 Real' onto his arm in an attempt to prove to *The NME* that the band were who they claimed to be. A few years later he disappeared, presumed dead by his own hand.

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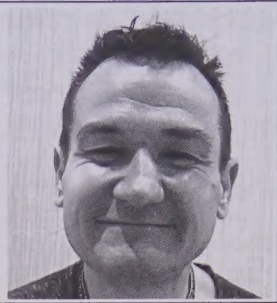
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From nothing to everything by Danny Crosby



A sad end for such a talented young man. How many other people have been destroyed by this need to be seen as authentic to others; how many of us have found ourselves standing there naked, seduced by the delusion that is 'The Emperor's New Clothes'?

It is hard to discern what is real in this age of 'fake news'. Who and what do we trust? There seems to be little or no sincerity and integrity. Dishonesty is not only accepted, but expected. This saddens me.

Sincerity is no easy thing. It is not easy to be sincere about who we are, to reveal to the world who we are, to live as we truly are, 'warts and all and beauty spots too.'

There is a phrase I often hear in spiritual communities that irritates me. It is used as an attempt to get people started. But I find it unhelpful and – in the long term – quite damaging. The phrase goes something like 'You've got to fake it to make it.' I believe the opposite is true. In my experience if you fake it you will never make it. I suspect the least spiritual thing a person can be is insincere.

Now 'sincerity' is a fascinating word and anyone who knows me knows I love etymology. There is a disputed theory about the etymology of the word 'sincere'. One theory suggests it is rooted in Latin and it literally meant 'without wax'.

It is said that in Italy during the Renaissance sculptures were plentiful and stones were sold everywhere. Not all stone sellers were honest. And some of the stones they sold were imperfect. The cracks were filled with wax. They tried to sell these cracked stones as flawless. So an honest stone seller became one who was 'sin cere' – a merchant without wax who revealed the cracks in his stones.

For me the spiritual life has to be the same. There are cracks in my belief, but it is honest belief. Each day I turn in faithful uncertainty and experience toward a life I never dreamed possible. I do it honestly, with integrity in humility which I have found leads to a greater openness.

To live with sincerity, with authenticity, is to truly be who you are. Do you know what? Our world needs us to live authentically. It needs us to truly be who we are, warts and all and beauty spots too. It needs us to be unafraid, to reveal our cracks, because when we do we encourage others to be who they are. We need to expose who we truly are to give ourselves fully to life and thus encourage others to do the same. In so doing we may just begin to create that kin-ship of love right here, right now.

So let's keep it real. Let's be who we are. Let us be unafraid to live the sincere life, to show our cracks. Let us live with authenticity. For our world desperately needs us to be so.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and Urmston.

Letters to the Editor

Rosalind Lee remembered at Stourbridge

To the Editor:

We very much enjoyed the article on the Rev Rosalind Lee by Cliff Reed in 4 October edition of *The Inquirer*. As Cliff rightly pointed out, the Rev Lee was minister at our chapel in Stourbridge for a short period before she retired.

Earlier this year we were delighted to be able to invite her niece, Sue Wright, and fellow members of Kinver Historical Society to the chapel for a talk on the history of Unitarianism in Stourbridge by our organist David Mearman. This gave her the opportunity to view the original portrait of the Rev Lee which hangs in our vestry. The Lee family are celebrated in the local area for donating land to the National Trust which is now known as Kinver Edge. The Lee family also donated the wonderful organ in our chapel over 100 years ago.

We welcome visitors to our delightful historic chapel to view the portrait and to join us in our services.

David and Carolyn Taylor
Stourbridge Unitarian Chapel

Lots going on at Padiham

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to Dorothy Haughton's article in the August edition of *The Inquirer*. I am a member of Nazareth Unitarian Chapel, Padiham. Our congregation has seen growth over the past few years, and we are fortunate to have children who attend (and indeed participate in) our services.

In her article, Dorothy suggests that congregations submit a short paragraph each month, outlining the activities their chapels are involved in. So here goes:

On 4 November, our chapel will be hosting a Model Railway Day, 10am - 4pm, for both families and enthusiasts (the turnout is always good and refreshments are provided). We also have a series of concerts running till Spring next year; the next one is on Nov 25th and will feature music from both the Ellison String Quartet and students of music from Giggleswick School (proceeds to charity).

Throughout the year we rent our chapel



Stroll down a very ecumenical street

To the Editor:

As I walked along Berkeley St to lead the service at the Glasgow Unitarian Church, I noticed several other places of worship in the same street. So, could this be the most ecumenical street in the UK?

Berkeley St, Glasgow has, as you might just be able to see in this picture: the Spiritualist Church, the Unitarian Church, a Presbyterian Church, a Gurdwara, and a Mosque!

Joan Cook
St. Mark's, Edinburgh

to local community groups, so even though our congregation meets only on a Sunday for worship, the chapel space is in use the remaining six days of the week. Currently, groups include crafts, meditation and yoga, with a strong presence from U3A groups, including philosophy, singing, local history and (yes, of course!) Ukuleles.

However, one of our greatest successes occurred in September when we got together with the local Sufi Muslim community for an interfaith service. More than 140 people showed up from diverse faith backgrounds for songs from a local interfaith choir, followed by Sufi Qawwali singers, accompanied by musicians. A shared meal followed. If you want to see it for yourselves it is available on UK Unitarian TV at: <https://youtu.be/U05Zz8QZzLQ> and <https://youtu.be/xOPgrLBNJ5k> (parts 1 and 2, respectively). Our chapel president also has a recipe available for halal lasagne (serves 100+).

It is through events such as these that we have gained new members. And as a result, three of us are enrolled on the foundation module of the

Worship Studies Course with the aim of taking services at chapel (our chapel committee agreed to try six experimental services during the year, so wish us luck!).

Paul Hubbard
Nazareth Chapel, Padiham

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes. Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only.

Cambridge celebrates accessibility

By Rosemary Watson

Following two years of planning and 10 weeks of building turmoil, the Memorial Church rejoiced in the completion of its Accessibility Project. Gone are the awkward steps; in their place is a gentle ramp from the street allowing level access to both the rear of the church and the hall, a great benefit to wheel chair users, the infirm and parents with buggies. Gone are the wooden entrance doors with their small paned windows to the hall – replaced by stylish automatic doors displaying our logo. These lead into a light-filled lobby off which there are four uni-sex toilets, one specifically for disabled users. The extensive remodelling of the former lobby has also provided a storage room. A further set of automatic doors lead into the main hall.

The congregation celebrated the opening of the new, inclusive facilities on Sunday 1 October. The ceremony was attended by members and representatives of organisations that hire the hall, neighbours, the local Residents' Association and the Architect Alexandros Michalitsianos (Archangel Architects). The ribbon was ceremonially cut by Shirley Fieldhouse, a longstanding member and church treasurer.

The Rev Andrew Brown, minister, is delighted with the project. In his address on the opening day he said:

'An important driver of the Liberal Christian, Radical Reformation and Radical Enlightenment traditions, to which this church belongs, has always been the desire to achieve in key areas of life maximum accessibility for the



Long-time Cambridge Unitarian Shirley Fieldhouse cut the ceremonial ribbon to open the new entrance to the church hall. (below) The doors are etched with chalices. Photos by A. Michalitsianos.

maximum number of people.

'However, for all our grand talk about accessibility to God, ideas, freedom of thought, education, democracy and all the rest, for generations, we've often failed to make the buildings in which we have pontificated on accessibility actually accessible to many members and potential members of our community. It's been a very poor show and for it profound apologies should be given. But, today, I hope we have begun to show the same commitment to enabling accessibility to this physical, concrete life that we have long shown when it comes to enabling accessibility to more abstract, ideal, philosophical and spiritual realms of human existence.'

The Project was made possible by grants from WREN'S FCC Community Action Fund and the (Unitarian) John Gregson Trust, bequests from the Falkner and Harrison families and generous donations from members and friends, and lots of hard work! WREN is a not-for-profit business that awards grants for community, conservation and heritage projects from funds donated by FCC Environment through the Landfill Communities Fund. The John Gregson Trust helps Unitarian places of worship to transform and re-purpose historic buildings into places that promote renewal, have community impact and are ecologically and economically sustainable.

Rosemary Watson is a member of Cambridge Unitarians.

Danny Crosby honoured by Altrincham Leet

The Rev Danny Crosby, (left in photo) minister with Altrincham and Urmston Unitarians was given the 'Freedom of Altrincham' on 24 September. A letter he received from Alderman Denise Laver, Guardian of the Silver Lion, explained: 'By virtue of the charter given under the hand of Baron Hamon de Massey of Dunham in the year of our Lord, 1290, the Freeman Burgesses of the Ancient Township of Altrincham have rights and privileges within the Lordship of Dunham Massey. The Worthy and Honourable Freeman Burgesses, reposing in trust, confidence and faith have recommended to the Provost and the Court Leet that the Honour of the Freedom of Altrincham be bestowed upon you. This decision is upheld in respect of your dedication to the community of Altrincham and its environs as well as all manner of charitable causes and community vestiges.' Danny said he was honoured and deeply humbled.



News in brief

Let there be Peace

A new Commemorative Badge designed by John Pickering is available to benefit a peace garden at Kendal Unitarians' chapel. He tells the story here:

'Recently I was asked to design a Commemorative badge for Armistice Day, and as I was doing this it seemed to me that the dove image was as equally important as the poppy. In today's world of so much upheaval and so many conflicts, adding the 'Dove of Peace' gave the design a wider appeal than the poppy on its own and moves the design more towards the concept of Peace in the present and future, without detracting from remembrance of the past.

'Kendal Unitarian Chapel is in the process of creating a Community Garden for those of any faith or none, which in effect is a 'Peace Project' which will help to bring people



together. In that context Kendal Chapel is offering the 'Let There be Peace' badge for sale to help raise funds for our New Garden, which will provide a unique place of peaceful remembrance and reflection for the local community.'

The commemorative badge for peace is made in Great Britain and is a high-quality 3cm x 3.5cm enamelled copper-cast badge with a safety-lock fastening. The cost is £5.00 including P&P.

A donation from the sale of this badge goes to Troop Aid and all proceeds from the sale to Kendal Unitarian Chapel Multi-Faith Garden Fund. To order, make your cheque payable to Kendal Unitarian

Chapel. Post your order and cheque to: The Treasurer, Kendal Unitarian Chapel Office, Branthwaite Brow, Market Place, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 4TN

Further enquiries: email unitarianoffice@gmail.com or tel: 01539 737021

Doris inspired return of Rose Queens



Chowbent Rose Queens reunited in the sanctuary of Chowbent Unitarian Chapel. Photo by David Shallcross

In the 175th Anniversary edition of *The Inquirer*, the heading on 'Doris' Column' read, 'Maybe it's time to bring back the Rose Queen'.

Well that's exactly what Chowbent Chapel, Atherton did in a Rose Queen Commemorative Service held at the end of August.

Around 80 people attended including 19 former Rose Queens who had served during the years 1942 to 1994 when the ceremony ended.

Chapel member Maureen Birchall who was Rose Queen in 1951 had, with much detective work, compiled a list of those who had served over the years and this was transformed into a roll of honour by another chapel member David Shallcross and is now on display in the vestibule.

Chowbent's Minister Brenda Catherall (Rose Queen in 1972) decided to hold a special service to dedicate the roll of honour and to celebrate a reunion for all those who had taken part over the years.

Some former Rose Queens travelled from far and wide to attend the service and the children from the Sunday School did a short re-enactment of the crowning ceremony. Organist Dorothy Williamson played some of the old hymns associated with former days and the recessional music of the Trumpet Voluntary by Jeremiah Clarke. Everyone present received a rose and the former Rose Queens a keepsake of the roll of honour, and at the close of the service processed out of the chapel. Brenda commented that this would be like the former Wimbledon champions parade!

In the hall afterwards a 'nostalgic' buffet was served with foods which were served during the old Walking Days (including jelly and blancmange). Old photos were on display and the event was greatly enjoyed with a chance to catch up and take a trip down memory lane.

Call for Submissions

The Lindsey Press, publisher of Unitarian books, is preparing a book of daily readings that it is hoped will be particularly helpful to Unitarians, and for others to reflect on Unitarian views or interests. They would like to invite suggestions for readings from all over our community (and beyond).

Readings should be short (up to around 150 words); pithy; and thought-provoking.

They must not require copyright permission for use, so either original writings, writings from the past (70 years from the author's death), or be such a small part of the overall work that their use can be exempt. If you want your suggestion to be tied to a specific date, please say so when submitting your suggestion for consideration to Kay Millard via e-mail at kay.millard@btinternet.com